

Excerpt from Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) Meeting

December 8, 2014

IV. Discussion of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board's 17th Report to the President

Mr. Jensen stated that mitigation, preparedness and adaptation were priorities for the administration. The topic of the GNEB's 17th Report will be "Climate Change Resilience in the Border Region." This topic aligns with the *Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda*.

The participants began the discussion of the topic of the 17th Report by noting synergies between the topics of the 16th and 17th Reports. Dr. Jeffrey Payne, GNEB alternate member representing Dr. Holly Bamford, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, emphasized the importance of connecting the ecological restoration expectations established in the 16th Report with climate adaptation in the 17th Report. Considering climate change will ensure that ecological restoration activities will succeed in the long term. Broad climate issues will be important. He recognized that climate is changing rapidly, requiring a long-term perspective. Environmental managers will need to consider climate change when determining how best to allocate limited resources. Dr. Greg Eckert, National Park Service (GNEB member), pointed out that, as with ecological restoration, the GNEB will need to develop an understanding of what the members mean by "resiliency." It will be crucial to identify the primary stakeholders for whom the resiliency activities are to be carried out. Mr. Stephen Niemeyer, GNEB alternate member representing Mr. Kevin Shaw, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, reminded the participants of the views of the states of Texas and Arizona on climate change and noted that GNEB decisions are made by consensus. Ms. Alice Ewen, Council on Environmental Quality, expressed appreciation for this reminder but reiterated that regardless of the terminology chosen, the President places great importance on the issue of climate resilience.

Ms. Ewen observed that federal agencies will be prioritizing resilience on a national level. The Board can leverage this focus on resilience to achieve higher prioritization of its recommended projects. There is a multi-agency commitment to develop a resilience index for natural resources and another for community resilience. Dr. Keith Pezzoli, University of California, San Diego (GNEB member), inquired about the priorities that will be used to identify landscapes, including protected and urban areas. Ms. Ewen responded that the DOI likely will be the lead agency in developing criteria and will carry out its charge within a 6-month deadline.

The participants discussed leveraging existing scientific resources on climate change resiliency. Dr. Pezzoli emphasized the ability of scientific research and data to advance achievement of the GNEB's recommendations. Mr. Jensen agreed that science and data have the ability to drive policy, although policy reports also have the ability to drive research agendas. Dr. Austin recognized the value of researchers from academia, state agencies and nongovernmental agencies, as well as federal agencies, serving on the GNEB. The following scientific resources were discussed:

- **The Nature Conservancy.** Ms. Ewen cited recent resiliency work being performed by the Nature Conservancy on the East Coast of the United States, rating large landscapes for vulnerability and developing funding priorities for long-term preservation, which might be generalized to the border region.
- **Department of the Interior.** Mr. Andrew noted that the Phoenix, Arizona, office of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has performed extensive hydrologic work that would be important to understanding water issues pertaining to climate change resiliency. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management develops data to make decisions related to water management. Mr. Andrew also cited DOI work related to the preservation of endangered species, including fish, riparian species and herps. The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) might be a source of data developed for large-scale decision making on managing landscapes.
- **Department of Homeland Security.** Dr. Pohlman suggested using the data from the DHS' annual *Scorecard on Sustainability and Energy Performance*, which is departmentwide but might be extrapolated to the border region, to help establish a baseline for climate change. She also cited the annual federal agency *Strategic Sustainability Performance Plans* as possible data sources.
- **Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience.** Dr. Pezzoli observed that the Council's *Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda* is a good source of information about land use.
- **Past GNEB Reports.** Dr. Austin stated that the first chapter—"Climate Impacts, Adaptation, and Mitigation"—of the 13th Report, would be a good source of information to review in preparation for developing the 17th Report.

Dr. Austin noted that what will be important when reviewing these and other sources will be to consider what data and issues are uniquely applicable to the border region.

Regarding champions for the GNEB's projects, Ms. Ewen stated that the November 2014 *State and Local Leaders Task Force Report on Climate Preparedness and Resilience*¹ provides recommendations on climate and natural resources that the GNEB might want to consider, particularly as California Governor Jerry Brown was a contributor. Ms. Ewen suggested that Governor Brown might be willing to champion GNEB projects that align with recommendations in the task force report.

The federal focus on environmental justice also has bearing on the topic of the 17th Report. Dr. Pohlman stated that recently, she had attended environmental justice meetings with tribal leaders at which climate change was recognized as being important and was a frequent topic of discussion. The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) also is very interested in the nexus between environmental justice and climate change.

Recovery from natural disasters is part of climate change resiliency. Under the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, the President was charged with establishing an expedited and unified

¹ Available online at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task_force_report_0.pdf.

environmental and historic preservation (EHP) process. Dr. Pohlman explained that CEQ, DHS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation are leading the development and implementation of a framework for coordinating federal agency EHP reviews for disaster recovery projects.

The participants discussed whether to include mitigation in its recommended activities or only recommendations that are reactions to climate change. Dr. Pezzoli commented that land use intervention both mitigates climate change and is adaptive (e.g., restoring the tree canopy in San Diego, California). Ms. Ewen agreed that the two functions, mitigation and adaptation, were difficult to separate in forestry. Dr. Pohlman suggested including reference to the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program and Green Globes®, a Green Building Initiative program, both of which can be used to grade system sustainability. DHS has developed Resilience STAR™, a program analogous to EPA's ENERGY STAR®. As an example of mitigation that also would be adaptive, Mr. Steven Kameny, GNEB alternate member representing Ms. Rachel Poynter, Department of State, noted that decreasing idling times at border crossings would reduce air pollution. This could be achieved by infrastructure changes (e.g., increasing capacity, offering alternative energy sources for refrigerated trucks). Mr. Joyce agreed that some recommendations, such as fostering green infrastructure, were analogous to avoiding the need for ecological restoration and would be good to include in the 17th Report. Dr. Austin noted, however, that a recommendation that might appear harmless on the surface, like fostering use of renewable energy, might have environmental justice consequences.

Ms. Ewen pointed out that a new \$1 billion grants program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program focuses on climate resilience. The Rockefeller Foundation is providing technical assistance tied to this funding, including performing vulnerability assessments.

Ms. Ewen again thanked the GNEB members for their time and effort in producing the 16th Report. She expressed her appreciation to Dr. Austin for her dedication and service.